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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 28, 2007

#### In Today's Papers

Annual ATC Conference in Washington  
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Yeni Safak and others report Defense Secretary Robert Gates said in a speech to the annual American Turkish Council (ATC) meetings in Washington that the Armenian genocide resolution and anti-American sentiment in Turkey were both "detrimental action" against US-Turkey ties. Gates also said more needed to be done against the PKK. Papers also report Ambassador Wilson called for "reconciliation and normalization of Turkey-Armenia relations." Papers also report the deputy chief of Turkish General Staff (TGS) General Ergin Saygun reacted to former Kurdish lawmaker Leyla Zana's remarks, who had said that Jalal Talabani, Massoud Barzani, and Abdullah Ocalan were "the three leaders of the Kurdish people." Saygun stressed such remarks invited the Iraqi Kurds to interfere with Turkey's internal affairs, and said that "Turkish prosecutors will do what is necessary regarding what such dangerous statements mean."

#### Beckett Cuts Turkey Visit Short over British Sailors Crisis with Iran

All papers report Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul asked his Iranian counterpart Manuchehr Mottaki on the phone yesterday for the settlement of the crisis over Iran's detention of 15 British sailors on charges of violating Iran's territorial waters. Visiting British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett has reportedly asked Turkey to assume a role in the settlement of the controversy with Iran. After holding a phone talk with Mottaki in the company of Gul, a disillusioned Beckett decided to return to London. "I had hoped that the situation involving our missing sailors would have been resolved by now. I have decided with regret to curtail my visit here so that I can report to our parliament tomorrow on the latest position," Beckett said in a statement.

Meanwhile, CNN Turk quoted Prime Minister Erdogan as saying early Wednesday at the Arab League meeting in Riyadh that Turkish diplomats may be allowed to visit British military personnel

detained in Iran.

#### Editorial Commentary on Iran

Okay Gonensin commented in the mainstream daily Vatan: "An expected tension is building after Iran's seizure of British soldiers. At the end of this tension there stands the possibility of a military operation against Iran by the US-UK alliance. Iran is already in a war with Israel at the Lebanese border and through Shiites in Iraq. With a possible US-UK intervention, the war will cross into Iranian territory. In this case, the fire will come closer to Turkish territory and our southeastern border will turn into a war front. There might be some people considering such possibilities as new opportunities for Turkey. Some might try to use this big fire as an excuse and try to resolve the northern Iraq issue. However, there is only one result that could be reached from such logic: to push Turkey into a fire which is not in Turkey's direct interest. As the possibility of a US-UK intervention in Iran increases, Turkey's policy should be to stay as far as possible away from this conflict environment. Turkey's short, medium and long term interests lie with Turkey remaining a strong fortress of peace in the region. The founders of this republic managed to keep Turkey out of trouble, even in more complex periods. There were people who tried to benefit from big fires in the past as well. Nevertheless, our recent history shows clearly what was right and what was wrong."

Sami Kohen observed in the mainstream daily Milliyet: "The Administration in Iran might try to use the hostages as a trump card for a lengthy time against the western world. Doubtlessly, this could turn into a very dangerous game. British Prime Minister Tony Blair stressed yesterday that if diplomatic attempts do not resolve this issue, a new phase would be entered. The new phase doesn't have to be a military operation against Iran, but any act of retaliation would increase the tension. Therefore, everyone should

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exert efforts to resolve this issue peacefully before it moves to more dangerous phases. Turkish diplomacy has already intervened in the issue for just these reasons. Recently, the Persian Gulf became a field for the US, UK and Iran to exhibit their powers. This stems from the region's economic and strategic importance and the conflict between the US (UK) and Iran over this strategic importance for their own interests. Although, the seizure of 15 UK troops by Iran seems rather a small incident which could be resolved easily, in fact, it is the result of this fight between the big powers."

#### Akdamar Church to be Opened Tomorrow

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report an Armenian government delegation led by deputy Culture Minister Gagik Gurjyan arrived early on Wednesday in the eastern city of Kars to participate in the inauguration of the Armenian Church on Akdamar Island near Van. Milliyet reports the spiritual leader of Armenian Orthodox Church, Karekin II, said he will not participate in the opening set for March 29, because the church has been renovated into "a museum."

Meanwhile, Hurriyet reports Prime Minister Erdogan and Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul have sent messages of condolence over the death of Armenian Prime Minister Andranik Margaryan to President Kocharian and Foreign Minister Oskanyan through the Turkish Embassy in Georgia.

#### Iraq's Vice President Visits Turkey

All papers report the Iraqi Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi met with President Sezer, Prime Minister Erdogan, and Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul during his one-day visit to Ankara on Tuesday. Hashimi said in response to press questions that Baghdad will not permit Turkish cross-border military incursions into northern Iraq. He said Turkey and Iraq should respect each other's borders and not meddle in each other's affairs. Hashimi said Iraq understands Turkey's sensitivity with regard to the PKK issue, but added that the current conditions placed obstacles in front of the fight against the PKK. The Iraqi VP, however, said Iraq will never allow its land be used as a base for attacks against Turkey.

#### TV Highlights

NTV (6 A.M.)

#### Domestic News

- Yasar Cihan, the head of nationalist party BBP branch in Trabzon, was set free after being interrogated by the prosecutor in connection with the murder of Armenian journalist Hrant Dink.
- Prime Minister Erdogan said he was disturbed by messages opposing Turkey's membership at the celebrations held to mark EU's 50th birthday.
- General Electric's CEO Jeffrey Immelt said Turkey was a country with huge potential in sectors such as infrastructure, nuclear energy, aviation, health, and consumer finance.
- Turkish Industry Minister Ali Coskun said customs union with the EU has helped the Turkish industry learn how to cope with competition.

#### International News

- Prime Minister Tony Blair warned that efforts to secure the 15 British Royal Navy personnel captured by Iran could "move into a different phase."
- A US federal judge said Tuesday former Defense Secretary Rumsfeld cannot be tried on allegations of torture in overseas military prisons.

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- Official results of a referendum say controversial changes to Egypt's constitution were approved by 75.9 percent of voters.
- The UN General Assembly commemorated the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, but added that slavery still persists for an estimated 12.3 million people.

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON